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THE IDEOLOGY OF THE YARURO INDIANS IN RELATION TO SOCIO-ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION

Anthony LEEDS

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It is the purpose of this paper to show the correspondence between the principles of socio-economic organization of the Yaruro Indians and their ideology and to isolate some dimensions of ideology which may be used for comparative purposes. It is hoped that by further isolation of such categories it will eventually become possible to compare the structure and content of widely different ideologies, as we today are able to compare kinship systems, so that we may be able to recognize synchronic regularities of a functional order and diachronic regularities of an evolutionary sort. Yaruro religious and philosophical beliefs are reduced to a series of postulates or axioms about the nature of the universe and man in an analysis somewhat like Kluckhohn's study of Navaho philosophy and Opler's of Apache themes. (1). No Yaruro would be able to express the axioms nor see them in the logical series as presented here, yet each would recognize them, when couched in the phrasings of his own language, as referring to his particular *Weltanschauung*. The postulates are derived from direct statements by informants about the cosmos or about human living, from other verbal materials such as discussions of disease and social organization, and, more occasionally, from observed behavior. The generalized titles introducing each of the summarized postulates appearing at the end of the paper comprise the dimensions, here inductively arrived at, which may serve for cross-cultural analysis.

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The Yaruro Indians have been living in the savannas or llanos of Southern Venezuela for an unknown number of centuaries. They have developed a socio-economic life well-articulated to the geographical conditions of life.

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The gross geographical characteristics of the alternately desert-like and flood-covered llanos cause all the best economic resources to be concentrated

(1) Kluckhohn (1949); Opler (1945).

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along the west-to-east flowing rivers in ribbons some kilometers wide. Most significant fauna and flora of economic use occur in these ribbons. This ecological distribution of resources governs subsistence activities whether they be mainly hunting, fishing, collecting, or horticulture.

Yaruro subsistence comprises all these activities. (2). Horticulture in the rainy season appears considerably to outweigh all other sources of food together, but in the dry season, hunting, fishing, and collecting perhaps equal or outstrip horticulture. In any case, slash and burn gardening of manioc, corn, plantains, and a number of lesser crops is by far the single most important economic activity. The technology is exceedingly simple in all aspects of production, the main tools being the machete and digging stick. The most elaborate technology occurs in the conversion of food into edibles and in the manufacture of hammocks, pottery, objects of wood such as canoes, and woven containers of all types.

The economic organization displays a sharp division of labor between men's and women's work. Men do all hunting and fishing, make all objects of wood, haul lumber and householding materials, make hammocks, and carry out the heavy labor of gardening. Women do most of the collecting of roots, seeds, and fruits. Since collecting contributes a substantial portion of the food supply in summer, woman's contribution, here, is of considerable communal importance. Women's work, a continuous activity from dawn to dusk, is, first, the conversion of raw foodstuffs into edibles. Second, women make all pottery, mats and baskets, the manioc squeezers, and much of the cord used to make hammocks. Another important contribution of women is their help in harvesting in the gardens. Men sometimes help the women with the cookery.

Men may work alone, in groups of 2 or 3, or in larger groups on rare occasions. No occasion exists for all men to work at a single task since there is no technological need for it. Women's work groups for collecting or householding are of similar size. Work group alignments are often based on choice or accident but in other instances coresidence and kinship are determinants. The household, however, constitutes the only really necessary cooperative group for production. The man is a funnel for produce which the woman converts to

(2) The present description applies to the Cinaruco River Yaruro where the major part of the writer's field work, supported by a grant from the Social Science Research Council, was done. The Capanaparo River Yaruro were reported by Petrullo (1939) and Le Besnerais (1948) as being hunters and gatherers, although Le Besnerais observed small horticultural patches which he claimed were diffusions from Venezuelan farmers which had occurred recently. Le Besnerais in 1954 states directly that they were horticulturalists, omitting any mention of possible diffusions from Venezuelans. The passing mention of horticulture by Fiasson (1947) confirms the present writer in his opinion that, although horticulture may be more restricted on the Capanaparo than on the Cinaruco and Cunaviche-Arauca (where the writer also spent several weeks) which are not discussed at all by Petrullo or Le Besnerais, nevertheless, the absence of horticulture is probably not aboriginal with the Yaruro as has been suggested by Kirchhoff (1948, p. 456). Rather the restricted gardening is a result of ecological conditions on the Capanaparo which are less favorable to horticulture than on the neighboring rivers, combined with extremely violent acculturation, including large-scale massacres of natives. The only other possibility, in my opinion, is that horticulture was introduced by the missionaries in the early part of the Eighteenth Century, which is certainly the period when the Yaruro first became acquainted with iron tools (cf Lodares, 1922).

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make it usable. The need to eat makes woman's work more or less continuous, while the nature of production does not make man's work continuous. As long as there is food in the village, the man may rest, help his wife, or engage in non-food production such as canoe-making, as he chooses. [461]

Objects used by men are men's property and are inherited by the men; objects used by women are women's property and are inherited in the women's line. Immovable property such as gardens and houses are said to be inherited by the decedent's children of both sexes. Male animals, such as boars and dogs, are owned by men, the females by women. Thus the division of property is as sharp as the division of labor, a fact reflected throughout the ideology. 428 [422] [231]

No two producers produce the same quantity or inventory of goods, especially as each has great freedom to concentrate in the productive activities he prefers to the exclusion of others. Yet each producer contributes to household and community in what is felt to be equivalent value since most foods are considered good and of equal worth. Each household producing unit distributes supplies of raw or cooked foods to other households along the lines of coresidence and kinship. In this way, all villagers, as consumers, receive the same total amount of food and no one goes without. Thus all persons and households in the community are equivalent as producers, distributers, and consumers. All are tied together in a loosely formalized network of coordinate reciprocal exchanges and obligations in which scales of value are not necessary, since each person contributes approximately equally of all values. In this situation, accumulation of wealth by individuals is out of the question and management of production or of wealth distribution is unnecessary. Consequently, there are no economic status differentiations and no effective leadership among the Yaruro. 433 592 621 [435] [556] [554] [622]

Similarly, no purely social differentiations based on status ranking occur in Yaruro society, except by casual deference to those of age and experience like shamans and village spokesmen, called 'capitans'. The status of women is coordinate with that of men. The complementary and coordinate units, a man and a woman, combine into a series of coordinate but semi-autonomous units, the households. A group of these constitute the Yaruro social unit, the neither endogamous nor exogamous (Murdock's "agamous") village. All these units are tied together by links of bilaterally traced kinship, with coordinate relations on both sides, the ultimate tie being the reciprocal marriage of cross-cousins. Marriage is ideally matrilocal, and occurs most frequently within the village. As a consequence, the most immediate kinship ties in the village are matrilateral, whereas kinship among the men is more diffuse. The villages themselves are tied together by kinship ties, real or imputed, as well as by marriage and visiting, but by no other ties of an all-tribal nature. People who are known to any particular village —to 'us'— are considered part of our village's family, since their kinship ties to our members can be discovered or invented freely. Persons recognized as being of our linguistic and cultural stock will be included under the general term *pumé*, but may not be considered 'of our family' unless the kinship ties are recognized. Thus there is a Yaruro people, but no Yaruro tribal unit. Even the persons included in 'our family' do not constitute a unit, since there are no cross village unifying institutions other than real or imputed bilateral kinship ties. Even these vary from 554 621 [562] [592] 621 [612] [602] [619] [612]

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village to village, since each village constitutes a separate and independent center of relationships with neighboring villages and consequently has its own unique assortment of outside relationships, based partly on choice. This situation, like so many other aspects of the socio-economic organization is reflected in the cosmology.

[776] According to the Yaruro, the cosmos originally lacked not only humans, but even gods. There existed only three, concentric, rigid, blue, celestial domes; below them, a flat, undifferentiated, vast savana all of sand; and a cold, dark, flat underworld. Beyond these there was, and is, nothing. Thunder, already then, was to be found between the upper celestial domes, while Sun, his wife, Moon, and their children, the stars, were already revolving between the lower two.

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Into this cosmos were spontaneously born the primordial gods. The goddess Ku'ma^{n}, the grandmother of us all, who lives in a land to the west, out of the savana created the discrete lands of her fellow gods and of the Yaruro. She created the non-Yaruro peoples, the *nivé*, first, and the Yaruro, the *pumé*, last, which is why there are so few - there were few left to create. She ordered Kiberó, the female toad who lives in the dark underworld to give fire, which she belched from her belly. Ku'ma^{n} created the foods wich are collected and the modes of preparing them. She instructed the men and the women in their crafts. She ordained the social order. Her husband, Poa'na^{n}, the snake god, who lives in a land to the south, created the characteristic savana features: the rivers, the woods, the grasses for the animals to eat.

[772] He taught men the technology of horticulture and gave them the seeds of the garden crops. He, with his fellow god, Icial, who lives in a land to the north and was born a boy given to troublemaking though he later matured, then taught the arts of hunting and fishing. Poa'na^{n} son, Hachawa, who lives in a land to the east, created only the ceremonial cigarettes. The four godly other-worlds lie beyond the Great Water which surrounds, but is not quite contiguous to, the Yaruro hither world. This geographical break in the cosmos is negligible, however, since the hither-world and the other-worlds become continuous in the thought and action of the Yaruro. The Great Water continues in an endless expanse beyond the four other-worlds, according to one interpretation, while in another, it is said to be enclosed by limitless, unpeopled and empty savanas. The four Yaruro other-worlds are also inhabited by a younger generation of gods all possessing Spanish names. Some interpreters identify these with the primordial gods. Others do not. According to some informants, they live in the same lands as the older gods. Others say they live in different lands. Such variations of religious interpretation occur frequently despite general agreement in all essentials. Individual freedom of choice and interpretation, already noted in connection with economic choice and social interrelationships, is also found in relation to ideology.

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The godly other-worlds are generally described as idealized versions of the Yaruro hab'tat. This is true also of a fifth otherworld, one which is discontinuous geographically, conceptually, and behaviorally with the rest of the Yaruro worlds, though similar in form. This is the land of Dios, the God of

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Christian Venezuelans, which lies between the two lower celestial domes and existed prior to Ku'maⁿ.

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It is to be noted that Ku'maⁿ was not responsible for creating her fellow primordial gods. She is not an omnipotent creator but is fundamentally limited to creating other-world and hither-world things familiar to the Yaruro. She exists in an independent but loosely coordinate status with other celestial beings or phenomena like Thunder, Sun, Moon, the stars, the rainbow, and possibly Dios — the prototype for personal status among the Yaruro. Furthermore, despite wide variation in creation myths, the fact stands out, too, that she must almost equal honors with Poa'naⁿ in the creation of all that is vital to the Yaruro in the hither-world in a creational division of labor closely paralleling the division of labor found in the actual economy. Further, Ku'maⁿ and Poa'naⁿ, by the link of marriage, provide a prototype for the essential productive and distributional unit, the household. Hachawa, their son according to some informants, and Icial, Poa'naⁿ s'ster's son, both boys at the time of the creation, contribute little and are as much nuisance as help until they have matured, an apt reflection of the position of children in Yaruro economy. Today Poa'naⁿ and Ku'maⁿ seem preeminent in status among the gods, but at the same time are definitely merely *primi inter pares*, occupying the position of more experienced elders within the community of the gods, each of whom acts autonomously according to his own dictates.

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The community of the gods is again prototypic for Yaruro hither-world life. Each god and his land constitutes a sort of village community populated by the god or gods, by dead *pumé*, by dead animals, and by the regular other-worldly animal population especially jaguars in human form and dress. The human-like inhabitants of the other-world eat, drink, dance, have sex relations, and visit from god's land to god's land. They enter into the web of kinship which ties the gods to each other, to the dead Yaruro, and to the live *pumé* of the hither-world in complex, if varying, genealogical connections. Even the great jaguar god, T:ó whose bailiwick is the first celestial dome and whose main task, under the general direction of Ku'maⁿ, is to cure, is considered distantly related and of the family of Poa'naⁿ. A number of animal species are similarly distantly related, but like those Yaruro who cannot be fitted into the kinship system, are merely connected to us nominally. The gods, the dead, and the live *pumé* equally observe kinship obligations. Thus kinship and visits among the autonomous lands of the gods are the chief ties holding the four other-worlds together, a prototype for Yaruro village and social structure. (3)

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Howewer, in relationship to the living, Ku'maⁿ is 'our chief'. More than any other god, she is turned to for advice, for ethical reaffirmations, and for fulfillment of needs. It is first to Ku'maⁿ bright and golden land that the *pumé* go at death, during unconsciousness, in dreams, and during the religious ceremonies, the *tonghés*. The other lands are visited later and are less important in the other-worldly journeys made by the living. The dead of Ku'maⁿ land are the first to be called upon by the shaman when, during the *tonghés*, he arrives in the other-worlds. He asks them, as well as Ku'maⁿ and the other gods, to

(3) Eliade (1954) emphasizes this prototypic quality of "primitive" ideologies throughout the book.

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776 775 return to earth and guide the community. In this manner, Ku'maⁿ is a center of gravity of the Yaruro ideological life. She is the center of a communications network which ties the Yaruro of the hither-world, those of the other-worlds, and the gods all in one continuous system of personal and social relations. This is somewhat the position of the spokesman or 'capitan' in the community [622] life of the Yaruro, though he has proportionally much less influence in his village than Ku'maⁿ has in her universe.

775 776 772 In sum, the gods and the dead are conceptualized as continuous with those of us on earth. Conceptually they appear to constitute the two highest steps in the age levels: infant, child, young adult, elder, the dead, and the gods. The last four classes are increasingly instrumental in teaching the ethics of living in tranquility, of respect and deference to one's spouse and to all members of one's people, and in teaching the values of the community. They exhort but never compel the community to follow these ideals. These precepts are followed not only among the egalitarian gods in their autonomous other-world communities, but in the personal and social relations between the gods and the hither-world *pumé*. The relations between men and gods, the communication between the hither-and other-worlds, the cosmography itself, all show quite clearly that [771] there is no separation of "natural" and "supernatural" as discrete classes of events. The cosmos, society, and man are a single system in Yaruro thought.

796 771 The nexus through which the flow of life in the other-world and the ongoing rhythm of daily life in the hither-world are meshed into a single system is the religious ceremony, the *tonghé*. Some description of the *tonghé* will afford us further insight into Yaruro ideology.

796 756 787 During the night-long *tonghés*, the entire community sits behind the shaman, ranged roughly by age levels. The women sit to his right, the men to his left. At dusk he begins to sing as he starts his journey to the land of Ku'maⁿ through the dark, cold land of Kiberó, the toad who gave man fire. In hundreds of improvised verses and melodies, he describes his journey, and then, after his arrival about midnight, his adventures in the lands of Ku'maⁿ and subsequently of the other gods. In each verse, the shaman sings an intonation which the entire community repeats in an identical antiphon. Thus the full experience of the shaman is transmitted to and shared by every member of the community. All is public; there is no secret knowledge. The shaman urges his people to sing with him and the other-worldly beings, to share in the responsibilities and joys of the community in supporting their individual members whether the [757] shaman in his journey or the sick person for whom the *tonghé* may be being held. At the same time, in Ku'maⁿ land, he urges the other-worldly beings to come to advise his people and teach them. Later, the verses are no longer sung by the shaman, but rather by the dead and the gods who arrive in the husk of [776] the shaman which he has left behind as a channel of communications for the other-worldly beings while his divisible self travels abroad. As these beings arrive in the shaman's husk, all members of the community may greet them by putting their arms around them or giving them cigarettes or drink. This is done separately by women, sometimes in groups, and by men. Throughout the ceremony the chief link between the sexually divided community is the shaman or the gods in the shaman's husk upon whom both sexes are focusing

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their attention. The shaman's position as link is emphasized by the fact that his wife invariably sits next to him during the *tonghés* to minister to him and to supply him cigarettes and drink. Thus, the socio-economic link of the household is also the unique link between the sexes in ceremonial life.

The various forms of socio-economic and ceremonial division of the sexes is even more remarkably underscored by the existence of female shamanism. As one might expect, shamanesses behave differently from shamans. Shamanesses sing only in the day-time. They, like Ku'maⁿ, sing from hammocks whereas men sing sitting on the ground or dancing. Furthermore, messages trasmitted to them from Ku'maⁿ are sent only to them, though the men hear and understand them. The men listen to these messages with care and respect and with the air that there are things to be learned from them which they would otherwise not hear. The shamanesses cannot receive male gods or their messages. Female shamanism seems to be an affirmation of the kin-bonds of the matri-centered local group as well as a means of asserting the values and rights pertaining to the women's world. The women's experience ideologically, as well as socially and biologically, is recognized as being systematically distinct from men's experience in life.

Behavior in the *tonghés* is very relaxed. Villagers laugh, joke, sleep, play, get up, walk about. Sometimes persons may even fail to attend if they have chosen to go to work the next day. The only thing explicitly forbidden, because Ku'maⁿ would consider it most indelicate, is sexual intercourse. Otherwise, the lack of formalism and freedom of individual behavior so often noted before is again found here.

The importance of the *tonghés* as the foremost way of reinforcing social relations and communal values as well as for curing is seen in several ways. First, when there has been no *tonghé* for several days, one begins to feel and hear a bruiting for *another* tonghé. It is felt that much time has elapsed since the last *tonghé*. Someone asks what's wrong that we haven't had a *tonghé* in so long. Another says we need a *tonghé*. Rumors of *tonghé* begin to be heard. By the fifth or sixth day another *tonghé* is held and community bonds are again reasserted. Again, the sexual division of labor and social life observed in the other- and hither-worlds is systematically carried through into religious observances. We have mentioned the seating of men separate from women and the separate greetings given to the gods. This theme is carried still further in the exclusive women's shamanism and the equally exclusive capacity of men to do curing, either as shamans or as purely private individuals.

The *tonghé* illuminates much about Yaruro ideology. First, shamans both male and female are not considered authorities possessed of special gifts and prerogatives who interpret lore for the entire community. Rather they are considered merely the comunity religious spokesmen for the public expression of community values and for curing, who, by their own choice, enjoy and are willing to undertake the long, arduous work of training and practice. They reaffirm community bonds by repeating in endless verses the precepts and knowledge contained in the Yaruro ideology. All knowledge and all experience is, at least potentially, open to all members of the community and even the private or personal experience of each is made known to all. Any member of

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the community may do the shaman's work if he chooses, just as any can travel to the other-world or commune with the gods, although, because of age, temperament, or individual taste, not every one does so. There were, in fact, two shamans among the nine men of the writer's village, as well as a number of men who cured and who occasionally sang verse intonations in the *tonghés* although they were not shamans. The shamans are no more than respected community members outside the ceremony. Here again we observe the egalitarianism and individual self-determinism which is so much a pattern of this culture.

The *tonghé* also clearly shows the relationships which prevail between men and gods. The shamans and the other adults of the village converse with the gods in great mutual respect. They do not manipulate them nor minister to them, nor implore them. Before the gods, they are in a position corresponding to active and adept junior members of the village before their elders and especially their lineal ascendants. Furthermore, in a very real sense, no individual person, *qua* person, deals with the gods. The community, with its religious catalyst, the shaman, is the unit of action. The only individual relations with the gods occur in dreams, unconsciousness, and death. Dreams about gods are made public by singing aloud in sleep, the experience of unconsciousness is recounted publicly, and death, too, becomes public because the dead man is accessible through the *tonghés*.

The directness of contact between man and gods again emphasizes the unity of cosmos, society, and man. Within this unity, the sharp division of a male sphere from a female sphere is found. These quite coordinate spheres, in the other-worlds as in the hither-world, in religion as in socio-economic life, are linked through the household.

In conclusion, I would like briefly to review the major dimensions of Yaruro ideology. We may state these as a set of propositions, each presenting a major dimension of the ideology.

1. Cosmic structure. ***The cosmos is static, limited, concrete, and internally continuous in that no barriers separate man and his society in the physical world from the nonphysical world.*** The parts of the universe together form a rather rigid, symmetrical, architectonic structure, although each individual Yaruro may vary the description of the whole to suit his particular taste. All parts are of roughly coordinate importance. The major motions of nature, such as thunder and lightning, the revolutions of sun and moon, are often embodied, personalized, and independently operating entities, moved by semi-human motivations.

2. The good. ***Goodness inheres generally in the cosmos as a system. The goodness manifests itself in understood causes and concretely and describably known parts of the cosmos which, whether places, persons, or things, are given exact locations.*** Conversely all known and localizable objects, persons, or places and understood causes are generally good.

3. The not-good. ***Evil, which is not polar to good, finds its locus in specific persons, things, or events inside or outside the cosmos, and is manifest in specific results. The underlying causes of evil, however, are inac-***

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cessible to the senses or to understanding. For example, all cosmic or extra-cosmic personnel whose locations are variable, vague, or unknown, are capable of doing evil. Being neither known nor localizable, they are not part of the unified kin and cosmic structure in which gods, the dead, and men and their respective lands are tied together. They exist outside society, hence only loosely attached to, or even outside of, the cosmos. Thus disease and death are both caused by sorcerers (*brujos*, Sp; *yareké*, Y.). These are described as wandering about freely in the savanas where they attack persons. Not only can the Yaruro advert to them only in the most indefinite way with regard to form, but they also specifically deny that human beings are or can be sorcerers or that human beings practice witchcraft. Thus, to the Yaruro, the major evils of disease and of wicked hearts (*corazones malos*) of individual Yaruros are caused by unknowable spirits. Even the chief and father of the *yareké*, Abukári, is as indefinite in form as his sons, and the Yaruro either do not locate him at all, or are very much disagreed as to his locus. No proper Yaruro self has any personal contact with him. Though the *yareké* are kin-related among themselves, they are not "of our family" (*de la familia de nosotros*), hence outside of our society.

4. The good society. *In the good cosmos, the good society consists of kin-related gods, the dead, communities and individuals of largely coordinate and reciprocal statuses living in tranquility and sharing all things.* Gods, community, and individuals are all actors knowing the general principles of the cosmic society. Such principles include kinship, equivalent rights and privileges for all.

5. The determinants of action. *In the good society, action is guided by precept, suggestion, and by sensibility to the wants of others and of self, but compulsion and hostility are not permissible.*

6. Nature of precepts and principles of action. *In the good society, precepts and principles are general rather than specific and prescriptive.* The result is that patterns of behavior and thought in Yaruro society are quite unformalized, unritualized, and unspecified. All classes of behavior show a great range of variability and flexibility. The individual can choose to fulfil his obligations to the community, an the community to the cosmos, in various ways.

7. Freedom or restriction of will. *The individual not only has a broad range of choice of actions but is not compelled by the nature of the cosmos nor by the personel in it to follow any particular path. He has free will with regard to the ordained order of things* (4) .Each man is, in theory, as in fact, to a remarkable degree self-determining in actions and thought. Except in extreme divergences, he need not account to anyone.

Several dimensions which appear as dualistic distinctions in western thought are conceptually single in Yaruro ideology. The self, as the expe- [828]

(4) Petrullo (1939, p. 229) first noted this aspect.

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riences in shamanism, dreams, unconsciousness, and immediately after death show, is conceived as being undifferentiated and unitary, though divisible into like, but unequally active parts. No mind-body distinction is made. Again in a static and limited universe within which, however, all parts, visible and invisible, sensible or not directly sensible, are in a flux of interaction, all things have some degree of reality. The distinction "real-unreal" as it is understood in the West is lacking among the Yaruro. Further, in this same universe, those parts which we might designate "immaterial" are, to the Yaruro, quite as concrete and sensed as the so-called "material" objects and events. The western distinction between "material" and "immaterial" is not a meaningful one to the Yaruro. Finally, the unity and continuity of what westerners would call "natural" and "supernatural" has been discussed above. Such a distinction is not made by the Yaruro.

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